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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

CURIOUS ORIGIN OF PORCELAIN.

ABOUT the beginning of the eighteenth century the King of Poland took the idea into his head that a certain Baron Botticher, an alchemist, had become master of the philosopher's stone, and therefore could manufacture gold in a manner not quite free from reproach. His Polish Majesty, in the exercise of his Royal prerogative, caught the unfortunate alchemist, and imprisoned him in the castle of Königstein—a very harsh proceeding, no doubt, and one which it would be wrong to palliate. Nevertheless, there were some generous qualities shown by the Royal tyrant. Not only did he allow our alchemist to take the instruments of his laboratory with him; he permitted him to have a gentlemanly establishment, and, what will turn out to be very important by-and-by, permitted him to wear a nicely-powdered wig.

It so happened that the baron had long been seeking for a clay which might enable him to form crucibles of greater infusibility than those he possessed. His inquiries for for such a material had been in vain. He gave up as hopeless the idea of procuring such a treasure, and resigned himself to other pursuits.

The worthy alchemist, although his lot was none of the most happy, never seems to have become negligent of his personal

powder, found that the case was this; Some little time before the incident of the wig, a horseman galloping over the region of Meissen Caolin, at a point whereat the substance cropped out upon the surface of the earth, the horse scooped out a portion with his shoe and stumbled, the horseman alighted, removed the clay, examined it, and admired its whiteness. He had a practical eye, which turned incidents to account, and all at once the droll idea seized him that he would dig up the white substance and sell it for hair powder. Hence the mystery of our chemist's heavy wig, and hence the original porcelain manufacture in Saxony. Botticher at once saw that the new-fangled hair powder was exactly the substance he had been so long hunting for. Not only did he succeed in making a better sort of crucible, but he laid the foundation of the white porcelain manufacture. The process of coloring it was not discovered until some years later about 1722—three years after his death. The first colors employed were brown and blue.

Saxony now became the sole manufactory of porcelain in Europe. Other nations envied, but could not imitate her. The manufacture was prosecuted by the government, and the Celestial Empire itself never guarded its secret with greater care, nor imposed so many difficulties to the departure of workmen from their native country. France soon became conspicuous amongst



SIDEBOARD IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE STYLE.

appearance. Botticher not only contrived to wear a wig, but he had it regularly powdered by a barber.

One morning, the powdering operation having come to an end, our alchemist felt a strange heaviness on the crown of his head. Such a heaviness he never felt before. To what should he refer it? He removed the wig, and made the important discovery that the cause of heaviness was there.

Summoning the barber, our alchemist demanded impatiently what had been done to his wig?

"Powdered with the newly-invented powder," replied Figaro. "A powder just come into use."

The explanation did not rest at this point. Our alchemist, having investigated the whole circumstances relating to the new

the competitors for ceramic fame, and, failing to derive information from their neighbor, sought it in the direction of China.

Early in the eighteenth century a French Jesuit missionary, François Xavier d'Entrecolles, succeeded in bringing to France a portion of Chinese materials, and made himself generally acquainted with the outline of Oriental porcelain manufacture. Very little, however, was gained by this, and very little improvement was made until the whole subject became chemically investigated, first by Raumur, and subsequently by Macquer and Montigny; when at length, in consequence of these researches, French porcelain, especially that of Sèvres, could vie with the best ceramic productions of Dresden, if not with those of China and Japan.